

Open Door Designs' Open Door

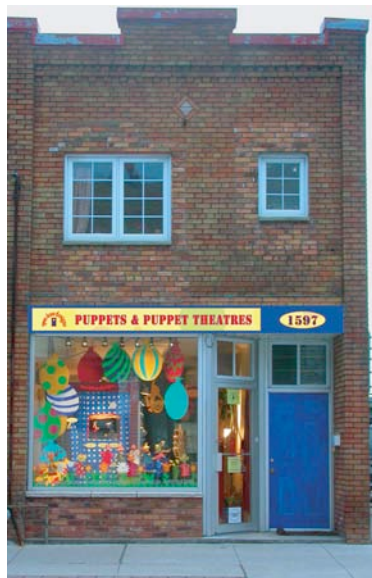
Open Door Designs' Joanne Bigham has been creating quality puppet theatres and puppets since 2001. An accomplished painter, sculptor and printmaker, Bigham entered the world of puppet theatre by chance. She spent six years on the road with children's entertainers Sharon, Lois and Bram as an "elephant keeper", props person and designer and later wrangled *Ella* and *CC Copy Cat* for *Skinamarink TV*, wildly popular with the under-six TV crowd. Open Door Designs was born when a friend asked Joanne to make a puppet theatre that could be taken to libraries and schools. She designed a simple fabric panel, the size of a doorway, that is held in place by a tension rod, making it adjustable to any height. Ingenious in its simplicity and perhaps the only custom-made puppet theatre on the market, the puppeteer stands behind the panel, pulls on a cord and a roman-style blind raises to reveal the stage. "The notion of using a doorway is very old," says Bigham in her fabric-filled studio. Open Door Designs Doorway Puppet Theatres are limited editions, ranging from \$85 for those made from whimsical cotton prints to \$150 for the deluxe models, fashioned from luscious, rich velvets and trimmed with tassles, baubles and beads. Open Door Designs can also make custom theatres for pass-throughs, double doors or even from specially requested fabric.

Of course, what's a puppet theatre without puppets? Bigham's line of cute but quirky creatures sparks children's imaginations. Imaginative play may seem like a throwback to a simpler time — before the Internet and video games dominated children's lives — but Bigham has found parents and children alike are drawn to puppets. "The theatre is very magical, the way it suddenly appears in a doorway," she says, "and puppets have a way of removing a child's inhibitions. Children don't have any fear when they speak through puppets." Open Door puppets range in price from \$15-\$0 for the child friendly hand puppets and \$35-\$45 for any of the Open Door characters in a cone puppet.

Open Door Designs' free-standing theatres are specifically designed for libraries, classrooms and professional performers. They assemble in minutes and store in a wheeled carry bag for ultimate portability. Open Door Designs' theatres are now in libraries, schools and institutions across North America and in Europe with applications as diverse as literacy, environmental education, a prop in the *Nutcracker Ballet* and creative play. Clients are also very varied: The Paddling Puppeteer, NFLD Department of Natural Resources; Burnaby School District #41, BC; City of Loveland, Colorado; Toronto Public Library; Tlingit Family Learning Centre, Atlin, BC; Marine Park, Ustica, Italy.



Open Door Designs Portable Puppet Theatres



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You may already have seen Open Door Designs creations on *CITYLINE* on CITY TV with Marilyn Dennis and Lana Ogilvie or more recently when *SHOP TORONTO* of Rogers TV visited the retail store. Open Door Designs' distinctive booth appears at a number craft shows throughout the year, including the Puppets Up! festival in Almonte ON, the Cabbagetown Festival and the One of a Kind Show in Toronto. Open Door Designs has been the recipient of two Best Designed Booth awards at both the Cabbagetown and London Home County Arts & Crafts Shows.

Open Door Designs, located at 1597 Dupont Street at the corner of Franklin Avenue just west of the Perth Dupont Library has evolved over the past few years from a production only studio to a retail store and a performance and workshop space. In this magic puppet universe with the ever-changing store window, you will find alongside Open Door Designs' own creations, work by local puppet makers such as Kelly Kirkham, Alexander Mergold, Knoggin Knitting and others. Open Door Designs Puppet Rescue area is a collection for viewing and purchasing of antique/vintage puppets from around the world. Featuring marionettes and hand puppets by past makers such as Pelham, Hazelle and Peter Puppet Playthings for collectors there are also gently used puppets that need new homes. Now open Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays, 10-6pm.